

Spending & Contracts Subcommittee
of the Northampton Policing Review Commission

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, November 17th

5:30 - 7pm

Remote Meeting

Join the Remote Meeting:

Video conference:

<https://zoom.us/j/92875023104?pwd=Zkk1TlpUTE1GbTR1em9CbFJRZEg1UT09>

Or by telephone, call: 1 (929) 436-2866, Meeting ID: 928 7502 3104 Passcode: 970517

1. Roll Call
 - Approval of meeting minutes
2. Public comment (30 minutes, 3 minutes per comment)
3. Discussion of budget and contract information requests, new requests
4. New Business
5. Adjourn

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Daniel Cannity at 6:08 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ZOOM RECORDING

This meeting is being recorded for the public record and would be available on Northampton Open Media, as well as, the City of Northampton website.

ROLL CALL:

Lois Ahrens Present

Carmen Lopez: Not Present

Daniel Cannity Present

City Councilor Michael Quinlan Present

Josey Rosales Present

Commissioner Daniel Cannity steps in to facilitate, in Commissioner Carmen's absence. He mentioned the subcommittee has received a lot of information back from Police Chief Casper including budget information. He asks the commissioners for general comments.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens wondered if the Policing Policies and Services committee will be ranking the services the police provide in order from most to least. She shared she feels there is no way to evaluate need just by looking at numbers and feels it is abstract looking at the budget without knowing what it's spent on. She asked about the process of sending information back and forth between subcommittee members.

Commissioner Daniel Cannity explained how open meeting law works in terms of sending information back and forth and mentioned the shared google drive. He said he agrees that it's a lot to balance and said the subcommittee can make more requests to the department and to the city as long as it's in the form of a specific question.

Commissioner Josey Rosales echoed what Commissioner Lois Ahrens was feeling in terms of frustration with getting unfiltered data without meaningful analysis attached to it which in some ways proves the point that policing as it stands is an ironclad institute that runs as business as usual and any questions about methods are placed upon others to figure it out if they want. They noticed the difference in perspective between himself and Jody Casper in looking at one line in the budget which talked about assuming every position will be filled, "but unfortunately this is rarely the case". They noted Jody Casper's sentiments in saying unfortunately the department is not at full policing capacity. He says, for him that is fortunate. They noted in January of 2020, there were nine vacancies, out of the total goal of eleven positions. He said clearly there are months with vacancies, while policing continues, without the need for the positions to be filled all the time. They said this seems like a way for the department to continuously ask for funds. They said the commission only addressing policing is not going to solve the problem and that Northampton has a homeless population that is particularly and winter is around the corner. They explained further, there are funds from the initial round of

defunding a portion of the police budget that could be used to address some of the core concerns that would help the community and that moving forward the commission needs to think about the meaningful places it can put the money towards things like public bathrooms and basic access to everyday necessities.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said there are many moving parts the commission needs to tackle. He recommended working with the other subcommittees to look at imagining a world without a police department for instance crisis response models which involve city organizations that don't respond while armed, don't charge people with crimes, and are there to support them. He said this subcommittee can look at what the department is spending right now. He noted in 2019, the department spent \$266,000 in overtime to police officers. He said pairing what the department is spending with what the department is doing, while organizing it in a meaningful way will help to make the argument toward funding community resources.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens noticed in terms of money, the school resource officer was making \$55,000 a year, and then was reassigned. She noted there was no gap in policing when he was at the school. She said it's hard to know what is needed if it's difficult to understand what is actually being done which she said feels like a big issue. She also noticed one of the department's goals was to "eliminate fear of crime in the population" (she paraphrased), which she is unsure how they do to do that.

Commissioner Michael Quinlan noted the officer who was in the school resource officer was put into the patrol officer group, which there are forty five. One person resigned, and the officers that were in the police academy were not hired. He said he believes there are forty-five officers in the patrol unit working five shifts each per week, with three shifts per day, meaning there are around ten officers working per shift for (225) shifts total per week. He explained that their crime mitigation strategy really is people knowing there's ten or eleven officers out there protecting the community, when this is not necessarily the case. He said they are spending hours of time rousting homeless people, and clearing a business' steps. He noted, in addition to mental health calls, that maybe the city could manage those services more affordably and compassionately by people who are trained to do so. He wondered at what point does a department need eleven officers on patrol when someone is having a mental health or addiction crisis when there's someone else who can do that.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens agreed with Commissioner Michael Quinlan and said there's basically no crime in Northampton. She said one of the main things officers do is unsolicited private property checks and when she looked at the call log, when suspicious persons that were mentioned, they were identified by the police which makes her wonder about the ranking of officers' activities and how to match these activities with the cost. She said the department spent \$83,000 in fuel for the year, and wonders toward what end.

Commissioner Josey Rosales said when talking about the reduction of crime people usually look at policing on the street and that their presence is the safeguard but there's studies and anecdotal evidence saying that this is security theater and it's just the illusion that people are secure. They said, the department spends a lot of the time driving around or looking in certain

places only to find homeless people behind Walmart. They wondered further, if this requires armed response. They said a lot of the police department can be transformed into something else and that if police want to serve the community, there are ways to start a separate branch of public safety for unarmed responses. They said most escalation is escalation by police and there are members of the community who could be trained in de-escalation, which would be cost effective for the city. They said police officers being present doesn't prevent crime, and to prevent crime you have to address people's conditions. They explained further, people who commit a crime are doing it as a form of necessity in order to scrape by and that crime goes down when you give resources to people.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said officers' interventions are reactive, and are not supposed to be policing what might be a crime. He said the commission could look at the spending in the city and name what prevents crime before it happens, which is investment in material conditions of people's lives for example, crisis spaces, shelter, food, and asking if these services are helping or perpetuating what the police do. He said he sees this role as looking at where money is going into and that they believe it shouldn't as well as asking questions about this funding.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said the commission might find that there is no crime and that a lot of their work has to do with trapping in terms of traffic control, which could be done by another entity. She wondered what detectives are investigating and how many detectives are needed. She named domestic violence, sexual violence calls, and wellness checks as crisis officers are called to show up for, not just policing going on in the street.

Commissioner Josey Rosales agreed with Commissioner Lois Ahrens and said the police has usurped responsibilities that belong to other public health initiatives which led them to an increased budget representative. They said not everyone feels safe calling the police, and that they may not be capable of resolving these calls without causing harm. They also said that a lot of the harm police cause goes unreported.

Commissioner Daniel Cannity said officers responding to wellness checks doesn't seem like the best process, especially in terms of providing care to someone whose mental state or level of crisis may be unknown. He asked the committee if there is more data it would like to request, and what actionable steps it can take before the general commission meeting.

The Commissioners discuss the day and time for the next subcommittee meeting.

Commissioner Daniel Cannity said he would like to see the committee organize budgetary information and compare the spending the department has done over years. He said the committee can start to draw connections and make meaningful statements and to identify areas, especially around quality of life, that might be better funded elsewhere so as to collaborate with the full commission on reallocating funds to immediate community needs.

Commissioner Josey Rosales said that there is a lot of work to be done and that Northampton isn't the only city doing it. They said there are plenty of examples of folks in the United States who have cut their budget by larger percentages than Northampton and have a higher population. They suggested proposing a motion to the full commission to begin talking about reallocating funding to community services, and that there is no harm asking for an immediate

shift when the need is urgent.

Commissioner Daniel Cannity said the commission exists to make recommendations. He mentioned Touching the Sky, a housing organization in the Pioneer Valley and wondered about looking into things like stopping the enforcement of camping ordinances. He suggested there is an option to submit a statement in support of this.

Commissioner Michael Quinlan said the first commission report in December can include a recommendation to invest some funding (already set for reallocation) to public bathrooms, a warming center which has been a large concern on many people's minds, as businesses and buildings will soon be more locked down for the winter. He said he is interested in how the budgeted salary of a police officer works with overtime and with detail work.

Commissioner Daniel Cannity agreed with Commissioner Michael Quinlan. He offered to put the budget information into a spreadsheet to compare and analyze the spending and percent changes overall.

The Commissioners and Noa Coffey-Moore discussed the day and time for the next subcommittee meeting.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Daniel Cannity moved to adjourn. The motion to adjourn passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.